

Still Image Collection, 1986 – 1993

60.6 cubic feet

JPL 94

History

This collection extends the JPL still image collection from 1986 to 1993; JPL Archives Collection JPL 78 contains photographs from 1940 to 1986.

The JPL Photography group (Photolab) created the images in this collection. A description of the JPL Photography group may be found in the register for Collection JPL 78. John C. Hewitt was the Section Manager of JPL Section 642 of which the Photography group was a part during 1986-1993

Prior to 1986 the various organizations at JPL had turned to the Photolab for their photographic service needs. By the mid-1980's imaging services had dispersed into several venues primarily due to the development of digital imaging that did not need to use a traditional camera (lens, shutter, silver halide coated film). Competing means to generate an initial image (e.g., CCD's, charge-coupled devices) used by spacecraft during a distant planetary encounter) meant creating electronic data that was assembled into images only after being radioed back to Earth. In an increasing number of instances the Photolab collection of images were generated by other than Photolab photographers on assignment; the Photolab's negatives became a file set with many sources of origin, much of it scientific data presented in image form.

The information content of this collection is broader than earlier Photolab negatives. While the collection continued to comprehensively reflect all JPL activity as had JPL 78, it also contained "pictures" that became part of its files with no preceding traditional processing.

Provenance

The JPL Photolab transferred the collection directly to the Archives on July 28, 1999 in four filing cabinets. The cabinets had been located in the basement of JPL Building 111. Due to lack of continued storage space caused by remodeling and a general low retrieval rate for these images, the Photolab turned the collection over to the Archives.

The Archives agreed as a condition of the transfer to provide the Photolab timely individual image retrieval and delivery.

Collection Arrangement and Description

In about 1986 the Photolab changed its previous the filing scheme, simplifying its multi-prefix system to use only two file sequences, a prefix **P** series and a prefix **JPL** series.

This collection includes only those images with a **JPL** prefix, started in May 1986.

The item arrangement in the collection is basically an ascending sequence of numbered items, JPL-2 through JPL-22379. In some instances this numerical sequence was expanded. Alphabetic characters were added to a base negative number to distinguish different images of the same object.

Following a 45-year old process, the Photolab had placed positive prints in pre-printed form-type Photolab kraft paper envelopes, with an attached glassine envelope containing a corresponding negative. Attached to the face of each kraft envelope was a computer-generated label, which included the following information:

- negative number
- JPL project name
- subject – a brief equivalent of a caption
- source or origin, including a photographer's name if applicable
- date produced
- vault, if such storage was needed
- requested by, which included name and section number of the JPL employee who contracted for the photo to be taken and paid for its costs
- miscellaneous comments

- printing exposure values or color printing filter values

Not all negatives had a corresponding positive print

Prints and negatives were primarily on 4 by 5 inch silver halide material. The negatives were mostly in color but black and white negatives and color positives were also part of the collection. Each negative was identified as color or black and white as part of its negative number.

The envelope packages were filed in four metal filing cabinets.

Conservation/Preservation

The collection received excellent care prior to archival accessioning; storage envelopes show little signs of filing wear. No particular conservation/preservation activities were carried out.

As a current Archives practice, when a negative is retrieved to answer a customer request, the glassine envelope is replaced by an archival polyester sleeve.

Separation Statement

No items were separated from the collection.

However, at least one negative was never created (JPL-1) and two are known to be missing (JPL-2730 and JPL-19742).

At any given time negatives sent by request to the Photolab may not be in the collection. For instance, during the first month after accessioning 10 negatives were out on loan.

Finding Aids

The organizational structure of the collection makes it basically a self-indexing collection. Cabinet drawers are labeled with negative numbers.

The self-index is of little use without prior viewing of an image and knowledge of its negative number. In contrast to Collection JPL 78, no photo albums with mounted positive prints that could be browsed were ever created by the Photolab for these images. Currently a way does not exist to easily browse images nor are any additional, separate finding aids available.

File List

Since the collection is self-indexing by negative number, no holdings list is included in this register.

Catalog Description

Still Image Collection, 1986 - 1993

60.6 c.f. (about 22,378 numbered items in four filing cabinets; mainly 4x5 inch silver halide photographic negatives and positives; mainly color; some black and white).

The collection includes still image photographic negatives with corresponding positive prints created by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory Photolab. The images were taken between May 1986 and November 1993 in support of various research and development projects. Included also are photographs of Laboratory buildings plus spacecraft at various construction stages as well as their final explorative products.

Register available in the repository.

Tracings

JPL – history

Industrial photography

JPL Photolab – history

Accession # 99-16